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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 8680
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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [AF](#) [FI](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: FINNISH COMMITMENT TO AFGHANISTAN STEADY BUT
ELECTION SURGE COMING HOME

Classified By: Ambassador Bruce J. Oreck for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The commitment of Finnish forces to ISAF continues to be a matter of public debate in Helsinki. All political parties (with the exception of the opposition Left Alliance) reiterated their support for Finland's current policy regarding Afghanistan including maintaining its participation in ISAF. The government's commitments were affirmed by CHOD Puheloinen and MOD DG for Policy Jarvenpaa in separate meetings with the Ambassador in the last week, though each made clear that Finland's "election surge" of forces would be withdrawn by October 28. While not optimistic about the prospects of stabilizing Afghanistan, around half of Finns polled continue to support Finland's current level of involvement there with around 35-40% favoring a withdrawal. Recent casualties among Finnish troops have not triggered a change in the public discussion. END SUMMARY.

BROAD SUPPORT FOR GOF POLICY IN PARLIAMENT

12. (C) On October 1 Parliament held a general debate on Afghanistan in which some 30 MPs participated. Finland's presence there was supported across the spectrum of parties with the exception of the Left Alliance, although support within the Social Democratic Party (SDP) was weaker than in the governing parties. SDP leader Jutta Urpilainen, however, argued in favor of maintaining Finland's commitment there in order to maintain a strong relationship with the U.S. Foreign Minister Stubb emphasized that no new troops were being asked to deploy and that no date of withdrawal should be set in advance. Defense Minister Hakamies added that there was no military solution and that political dialogue was necessary. NOTE: Hakamies has continued to emphasize the need for dialogue with what he terms "moderate Taliban" since his return from the U.S. in September; he went so far as to publicly suggest that the EU nominate Green Party MP Pekka Haavisto as a mediator to conduct such a dialogue. Embassy sources indicate that this idea has not been discussed inside the GOF and we do not believe that it represents government policy. END NOTE. The idea of increasing Finland's troop presence and changing the mission to one allowing offensive action was debated but rejected by most participants. The idea of maintaining or increasing Finland's focus on development and humanitarian aid in Afghanistan in the long term drew broad support. This debate took place just before four Finnish soldiers serving in ISAF were injured by a roadside bomb, two of them seriously enough to be evacuated back to Helsinki. Reaction to the casualties in the media has been very muted and the topic does not appear to have affected the public debate on the issue.

ELECTION SUPPORT FORCES WITHDRAWING OCTOBER 28

13. (C) In a private meeting with the Ambassador on October 8, MOD Director General for Policy Dr. Pauli Jarvenpaa indicated a decision would be taken by the Finnish government to redeploy Finland's Election Support Force (ESF) troops on schedule in late October. He believed this would occur regardless of whether questions over the validity of the election were resolved or not. In a meeting with the Ambassador on October 13, GEN Ari Puheloinen, the FDF Chief of Defence confirmed that the ESF would be redeployed as planned on 28 October. GEN Puheloinen cited several reasons for this redeployment. FDF personnel deployed to support crisis management operations must volunteer and are given a specific time by contract for their deployment. These contracts for ESF personnel are complete at the end of October. There is no political will (and probably no legal standing) to involuntarily extend members of the ESF, and indications are that a majority of ESF members would not volunteer to extend their contract. The lead forces in the Finnish area of operation are the Swedes, and they are preparing to conduct a planned rotation. During this rotation, according to Puheloinen, there would not be sufficient quarters to support the ESF if they stayed. Lastly, available crisis management funds are limited and an extension of the ESF for some indefinite period is not in the budget. NOTE: DG Jarvenpaa specifically stated that funding was not/not a reason for the redeployment. END NOTE.

POLLING SHOWS FINNS STEADY BUT NOT OPTIMISTIC

14. (U) According to a poll published by Helsingin Sanomat on September 30, 49% of Finns favor Finland's participation in crisis management operations in Afghanistan, 35% would withdraw Finnish troops, and 16% have no opinion. 65% believe Afghanistan is unlikely or highly unlikely to achieve democracy or protection of human rights. An MTV3 poll on September 24 reported that 66% of Finns do not believe that ISAF will be able to stabilize Afghanistan while 22% are confident that it could. 44% favored Finnish participation at current troop levels and 40% favored a total withdrawal. ORECK